



Durham Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 4, Community Character and Design Element

**Durham City-County Planning Department
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The Durham Comprehensive Plan

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Chapter 4, Community Character and Design Element

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Community Character and Design Element



Summary of Issues
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Durham's character is unique and diverse, including picturesque farmlands, turn of the century urban neighborhoods, modern suburban developments, historic downtown warehouses, and scenic natural areas. As Durham continues to evolve, it is important to preserve the positive aspects of the community and enhance existing development. A vision for community character and design should guide future development, creating functional, aesthetically appealing, and people-oriented places.

Summary of Issues

1. **Approaches to Community Design.** Durham's suburban-gear development standards require amendments to produce more attractive new development that is appropriate to its context. How should Durham regulate new development in order to secure attractive and functional built environments? How do tailored development standards for specific areas keep the overall eclectic community feel? How does Durham ensure that government facilities meet the standards set for private development?
2. **Community Maintenance.** While the appearance of new development is a central focus of community design and character, the on-going maintenance of Durham's built environment makes a greater visual impression. How can Durham best encourage private property owners to maintain their buildings and land? How can the City and County maintain their public rights-of-way, buildings and grounds to enhance the visual appearance of the community?
3. **Protecting Rural Character.** Citizens are concerned that Durham's rural areas are threatened by encroaching urban and suburban development. Which aspects of its rural character should Durham preserve and where should preservation activities be focused? How can Durham preserve its some of its valuable rural character in an increasingly urban County?
4. **Improving Entryways.** City and County leaders have expressed interest in improving the appearance of major entryways into the

Durham community. What steps can Durham take to improve the appearance of road corridors and entryways into Durham?

5. **Tree Protection.** Community leaders have expressed concerns that current regulatory requirements are not achieving the objective of securing new development with greater tree coverage. How can Durham increase its incentives or decrease its disincentives for developers to preserve natural vegetation and existing tree canopy on new development sites?
6. **Site Design and Safety.** Crime prevention through environmental design involves site design with safety in mind. How can Durham best integrate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in the design of new development? What regulatory provisions should be established to ensure that safety is appropriately considered in development design?
7. **Street Tree Replacement.** Durham's existing street trees are a pleasant and attractive amenity for many of its older neighborhoods. Yet many of Durham's majestic street trees may reach the end of their natural life over the next two decades. How should Durham address this potential loss of street tree canopy?
8. **Parking Lot Landscaping.** Citizens have expressed concerns over the barren appearance of older commercial parking lots, suggesting a retrofit of extensive landscaping. How can Durham enhance these facilities?
9. **Underground Utility Lines.** The issue of buried utility lines has been a hot topic in Durham for many years, both with the elected officials and the general public. What can Durham do to promote the burial of utility lines?
10. **Facade Variety.** A growing concern in the suburban community is that of facade monotony in new housing developments. How can Durham encourage facade variety? How is consistency balanced with variety?
11. **Public Spaces.** The incorporation of a variety of public spaces is an amenity frequently sought after by both citizens and public officials. What kinds of incentives can Durham offer for the provision of public spaces?
12. **Transit Stops.** As transit becomes a more feasible and convenient option, transit stops will likely become more prominent in the community. How can Durham ensure attractive designs for transit stops?

Goal 4.1, Community Design Guidance

Provide guidance in the design and development of the community to ensure a visually appealing and functional built environment.

Objective 4.1.1. Design Guidelines and Standards

Develop guidelines and standards for the design of new development that promote quality design.

Policy 4.1.1a. Tier Design Standards. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, develop design standards tailored to each development Tier to maintain each area's unique character.

Policy 4.1.1b. Design Overlay Districts. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, establish design overlay districts, such as a Downtown Design Overlay District and Neighborhood Protection Overlay Districts. Develop design review guidelines for application within each of these design overlay districts.

Policy 4.1.1c. Building Arrangement. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, establish Tier-appropriate standards for building placement in relation to the street. Use build-to lines in the Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers. Use setbacks in the Suburban and Rural Tiers.

Policy 4.1.1d. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. Ensure the consideration of *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (CPTED) strategies in site design through integration of CPTED principles in the Unified Development Ordinance and design guidelines.

Policy 4.1.1e. Appearance Commission Review of Government Buildings Projects. In order to enhance their design and appearance, the Durham Appearance Commission shall review and comment on proposed major public building development projects, including buildings, Durham-funded parking projects, public signage programs, and significant NC DOT projects within Durham County.

Goal 4.2, Design Quality

Encourage quality at all levels of design. Design quality impacts the actual function and appearance of a place as well as the perceptual feel of that place.

Objective 4.2.1. Design Features

Encourage designs that use resources efficiently, maximize site amenities, and preserve important features.

Policy 4.2.1a. Unique Site Features. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require the retention and incorporation of unique site features into required open space. Unique site features include rock outcroppings, wetlands, streams, steep slopes, cemeteries, and Durham Inventory Sites.

Policy 4.2.1b. Historic Resources in New Development. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require the

preservation and/or incorporation of historic resources in the design of new development.

Policy 4.2.1c. Open Space in New Development. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require new developments to provide and maintain open space. Create standards for the amount and character of open space for each Tier. Open space requirements shall range from a small amount in the Downtown to a significant amount in the Rural Tier.

Policy 4.2.1d. Specimen Trees Preservation. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, ~~encourage~~ require the preservation of perimeter specimen trees and other desirable trees in the buffers in the Suburban and Rural Tiers by allowing variable buffer widths.

Policy 4.2.1e. Public Art. The Appearance Commission and the City-County Planning Department shall explore how ~~and whether Durham should~~ to encourage the incorporation of public art in new development projects, particularly in the Downtown and Compact Neighborhood Tiers.

Policy 4.2.1f. Mixed Use Development Design Criteria. The Unified Development Ordinance shall provide design criteria for Mixed Use Development in order to provide more visual appeal, to ensure integration of uses, and to ensure a compatible design theme throughout the development.

Objective 4.2.2. Attractive Residential Development

Encourage attractive and varied residential development throughout the community.

Policy 4.2.2a. Varied Housing in New Development. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, provide variability of lot size and allow a variety of housing types and styles in new residential developments to avoid monotony.

Policy 4.2.2b. Garage Placement. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, provide opportunities to vary the location, setback, and orientation of residential garages to avoid prominent and repetitious garage placement.

Objective 4.2.3. Attractive Nonresidential Development

Incorporate attractive nonresidential development into the existing community character, ensuring that it is made an integral and appealing part of the built environment.

Policy 4.2.3a. Strip Commercial Development. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, prohibit strip commercial development in the Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers. Develop design standards to limit expansive parking lots in front of strip commercial development in the Suburban Tier.

Policy 4.2.3b. Nonresidential Signage. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, develop different design standards for attractive nonresidential signage appropriate to each development Tier. Signs within projects in the Suburban and Rural Tiers shall be compatible in appearance, while signs in the Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers shall be allowed greater variety and flexibility in their design.

Policy 4.2.3c. City and County Government Facility Standards. Require City and County government facilities to meet the design standards set for private development.

Policy 4.2.3d. Nonresidential Maintenance Standards. The Governing Bodies shall establish a “nonresidential code” to set maintenance standards for nonresidential development, which at a minimum cover buildings, parking lot surfacing, landscaping, and lighting.

Objective 4.2.4. Attractive and Efficient Parking

Encourage the design of attractive and efficient parking solutions, which are visually appealing, safe, and easy to use by both pedestrians and motorists.

Hardscape

Hardscape is all non-landscaped areas, usually treated with materials such as stone, brick, concrete or asphalt.

Policy 4.2.4a. Parking Design Standards. The City-County Planning Department shall review, revise, and continue to enforce design standards in order to encourage the provision of well designed, efficient, and attractive parking facilities in connection with new development projects. Explore limiting street frontages, increasing landscaping, requiring pedestrian walkways throughout parking areas, and encouraging that large lots be designed as a series of smaller lots.

Policy 4.2.4b. Parking Requirements. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, redefine parking standards in all Tiers and eliminate compact car parking requirements. Explore opportunities for shared parking.

Policy 4.2.4c. On-Street Parking. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, provide for on-street parking in the Suburban, Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers to minimize the size of lots and garages, maximize access, and provide additional street activity. Attractive on-street parking can be achieved through landscaped or hardscape bump-outs that break up lengthy street parking, shade trees and decorative lighting along the street, and decorative paving for the parking lanes.

Policy 4.2.4d. Structured Parking Design. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require street front parking structures to be architecturally compatible with the surrounding area’s character. Require that parking structures be designed to include present or future street level retail or office space.

Policy 4.2.4e. Structured Parking Incentives. The City Office of Economic and Employment Development and the City-County

Planning Department shall explore options for incentives to encourage parking in structures rather than surface lots in Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers.

Policy 4.2.4f. Retroactive Parking Lot Landscaping. The Durham City-County Appearance Commission shall explore opportunities to retrofit existing commercial parking lots with additional landscaping.

Objective 4.2.5. High Performance Design

Encourage new construction that uses high performance design, including energy and water efficient design, minimizing construction waste; and use of renewable, recycled or reused building materials.

Policy 4.2.5a. Design of Public Buildings. In the design of public buildings, the City and County shall require the incorporation of environmentally responsible building practices through compliance with *LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)* or the Triangle J Council of Governments' (TJCOG) *High Performance Guidelines*.

Policy 4.2.5b. Recognition of Private Sector Efforts. The Environmental Affairs Board shall ~~recognize~~ identify and encourage recognition of private sector examples of high performance design by publicizing compliance with *LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)* or the Triangle J Council of Governments' (TJCOG) *High Performance Guidelines*.

Policy 4.2.5c. Daylighting in Schools. In order to maximize student performance, designs for new schools and major school renovations shall incorporate daylighting techniques. (See Chapter 11, Schools Element, Policy 11.2.3c, Daylighting.)

Goal 4.3, Contextual Design

Encourage development that is designed to be conscious of and sensitive to its surroundings. Contextual design considers the setting as much as the project itself, is applicable in a variety of areas and situations, and should guide any development.

Objective 4.3.1. Protecting Rural Character

Identify, protect, and reinforce the character of Durham's rural areas, and recognize and protect the unique aesthetic qualities of scenic roadways and rural vistas.

Policy 4.3.1a. Rural Village Design Guidelines. By 2005, the City-County Planning Department shall establish village design guidelines to protect the character of Durham's rural villages, Bahama and Rougemont, by encouraging appropriate and compatible infill and development design.

Infill

Infill is development of vacant land, usually individual lots or leftover properties, within areas that are already largely developed.

Policy 4.3.1b. Clustered Development. Through the Unified Development Ordinance and site design guidelines, provide opportunities for clustered development in order to preserve farmland, open spaces, historic resources, views and vistas, and other elements of Durham's rural character.

Policy 4.3.1c. Scenic Roads Identification. The City-County Planning Department, in conjunction with the Appearance Commission, shall identify scenic rural roads that are not currently designated as NC Scenic Byways, and develop proposals to preserve native and natural vegetation and discourage invasive species along those roads.

Policy 4.3.1d. Scenic Vista Preservation. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, protect scenic vistas through viewshed protection measures, such as expanded rural frontage setback requirements.

Policy 4.3.1e. NC Scenic Byways. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, protect Durham's Scenic Byways, through viewshed protection measures such as expanded rural frontage setback requirements. See Map 4-1, Scenic Byways.

Objective 4.3.2. Compatible Infill

Preserve the character and integrity of existing viable neighborhoods by promoting compatible urban and suburban infill.

Policy 4.3.2a. Infill. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, encourage and promote compatible infill housing on vacant or under utilized property within residentially developed portions of the community to reinforce the existing residential character. Include provisions for contextual design of both residential and nonresidential infill projects in the Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers.

Policy 4.3.2b. Traditional Design Elements. To protect the character of existing neighborhoods, the Unified Development Ordinance shall include provisions for a Neighborhood Protection Overlay District. The District shall require in new construction the use of site and building design elements that are common in existing development in the neighborhood. These could include building materials, rooflines, scale, fenestration rhythm and architectural details.

Viewshed

The viewshed is the portion of the landscape that is visible from the roadway or a certain point.

Objective 4.3.3. Appropriate Nonresidential Design

Ensure that the design of nonresidential development is appropriate and compatible with its surroundings, acting as a visual and functional asset to nearby residential areas, and reinforcing the existing community character.

Policy 4.3.3a. Nonresidential Design Standards. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, establish design standards for new nonresidential development in the Suburban Tier.

Policy 4.3.3b. Standards for School Site Sizes. The Durham Public Schools shall establish alternative standards for the size of elementary, middle and high school sites appropriate to each Tier. (See Chapter 11, Schools Element, Policy 11.2.2e, Standards for School Site Sizes.)

Goal 4.4, Roadway Image

Project an attractive community image along Durham's roadways. Roadway appearance is a critical component of community character, unifying areas, acting as the foreground for developments, providing views, and even functioning as a series of outdoor rooms. Roadway image sets the scene for the community's built environment.

Objective 4.4.1. Streetscape Appearance

Enhance the general appearance and unique visual character of Durham's streetscapes. Create an attractive visual image along major corridors and around prominent entryways. Design streets to be compatible with the character of the area they serve.

Policy 4.4.1a. Corridor Plans. ~~The City-County Planning Department~~ City and County, in conjunction with the Appearance Commission, shall prepare corridor plans to improve the function and appearance of major roadways into and through Durham. Corridor plans shall recommend appropriate land uses, design standards, development controls, landscaping, signage regulation, access management strategies, public facilities capital improvements, underground utilities and/or other measures. ~~The highest priority~~ Consideration shall be given to the following roadway corridors, as shown on Map 4-2, Proposed Corridor Plans.

- i. Duke Street, from I-85 to Roxboro Road;
- ii. Guess Road, from Club Boulevard to the Eno River;
- iii. Hillsborough Road, from Fulton Street to Cole Mill Road;
- iv. Roxboro Road, from Duke Street to Milton Road;
- v. NC 98, from US 70 Bypass to Lynn Road;
- vi. US 70 from NC 98 to the Wake County line;
- vii. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway, from University Drive to NC 55;
- viii. NC 54, from the Orange County line to the Wake County line;
- ix. NC 55, from the NC 147 to the Wake County line; ~~and~~
- x. Fayetteville Street from NC 147 to Renaissance Parkway; and
- xi. US 15-501, from Orange County to University Blvd.

Policy 4.4.1b. Tier Streetscape Standards. The City-County Planning Department shall develop streetscape standards for each Tier that set up or reinforce themes appropriate to those areas. Street tree locations that range from large setbacks in the Rural

Streetscape

Streetscape is the space in the public right-of-way between the buildings on either side of the street. It may include the sidewalk, streetlights, street trees, landscape strip, and street furniture.

Tier to small or no setbacks in the Downtown Tier shall be a part of the standards.

Policy 4.4.1c. Sidewalk Requirements. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require sidewalks on both sides of all streets (public or private) in the Downtown, Urban, and Compact Neighborhood Tiers. In the Suburban Tier, require sidewalks on both sides of streets serving medium and high intensity development and on one side of all streets (public or private) serving low intensity development. The Unified Development Ordinance shall allow alternative pedestrian networks.

Policy 4.4.1d. Wide Sidewalks. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require a minimum of eight-foot wide sidewalks for all development in the Downtown Tier, and for nonresidential development in the Urban and Compact Neighborhood Tiers, with exceptions designated in the Unified Development Ordinance.

Policy 4.4.1e. Pedestrian Mobility. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, make walking easy by requiring internal pedestrian walkways on sites with multiple buildings, courtyards, or other exterior on-site shared spaces. The Unified Development Ordinance shall require bicycle and pedestrian lanes to connect cul-de-sacs and to provide access to open space areas.

Policy 4.4.1f. Pedestrian Amenities. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require pedestrian amenities on streets and in open space in the Downtown, Urban and Compact Neighborhood Tiers. Amenities may include seating, waste receptacles, information kiosks, shaded areas, water features and landscaping.

Policy 4.4.1g. Buried Utility Lines. The City-County Planning Department shall continue to require the underground burial of utility lines in new subdivisions, and look for ways to retrofit them in other areas.

Policy 4.4.1h. Consolidated Utilities. The City-County Planning Department and City Public Works Department shall explore opportunities to consolidate utilities and pole-mounted elements to minimize the visual clutter along the street in the Downtown and Compact Neighborhood Tiers. Durham shall seek legislative authority and investigate the possibility of establishing utility districts, to include key gateways, Historic Districts, and Neighborhood Protection Overlay Districts.

Policy 4.4.1i. Major Transportation Corridor Overlay District. The City-County Planning Department shall propose applying the Major Transportation Corridor (MTC) overlay district along specific segments of major roads such as I-85, NC 147, East End Connector, US 15/501, and NC 54.

Policy 4.4.1j. Gateway Plans. The City-County Planning Department, in conjunction with the Appearance Commission,

shall identify key gateways into and within the Durham community and shall prepare plans, including design guidelines, to create focal points and enhance their appearance. ~~The highest priority~~ Consideration shall be given to the following gateway locations, as shown on Map 4-3, Proposed Gateway Plans.

- i. I-85 and NC 147;
- ii. NC 147 and Briggs Avenue;
- iii. I-40 and US 15-501;
- iv. I-85 and Duke Street;
- v. Chapel Hill Street and Pettigrew Street;
- vi. US 70 and Page Road;
- vii. Old Five Points;
- viii. Roxboro Road and Pettigrew Street;
- ix. I-40 and I-540;
- x. Gregson Street and Morgan Street; and
- xi. I-85 and Falls Lake.

Policy 4.4.1k. Street Tree Replacement. The Roadway Appearance Division of the Public Works Department shall develop a comprehensive plan for street tree replacement in the Downtown and Urban Tiers.

Goal 4.5, Compact Neighborhood Design

In the Compact Neighborhood Tier, promote development and design that supports transit and its related uses and activities. Transit supportive design must coordinate the scale of development on the site and pedestrian amenities, and minimize auto dependence.

Objective 4.5.1. Compact Neighborhood Plans

Plan for and reinforce the transit-oriented nature of development in the Compact Neighborhood Tier through appropriate site and building design.

Policy 4.5.1a. Compact Neighborhood Plans. The City-County Planning Department shall prepare Compact Neighborhood Plans for the areas around regional transit stations. The Compact Neighborhood Plans shall:

- i. Establish distinct design guidelines that recognize the unique characteristics of each area and require compatible development, both internally within the Tier and externally with surrounding development;
- ii. Require the incorporation of necessary public facilities to support anticipated private development, possibly including parks, plazas, community use sites and other public facilities;
- iii. Establish design standards for attractive transit stops; and

- iv. Require the provision of pedestrian and bicycle amenities and the alignment of streets and pedestrian walkways so that the Core Area and transit station are directly accessible by pedestrians.

Objective 4.5.2. Transit-Oriented Parking

Design parking areas in the Compact Neighborhood Tier to support transit-oriented development. De-emphasize private car usage and minimize the visual prominence of parking facilities.

Policy 4.5.2a. Surface Parking Lot Frontage. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, require that nonresidential surface parking lots be located in the rear, away from the street, and limit parking lot street frontage to 65 feet in the Compact Neighborhood Tier. Require parking lot street frontages to meet standards to maintain the existing building facade lines of the block.

Policy 4.5.2b. Compact Neighborhoods Surface Parking. Through the Unified Development Ordinance, limit the contiguous surface area of parking lots in the Core Areas of Compact Neighborhoods, except for transit supportive park-and-ride lots. As an interim measure, restrict surface parking to locations that could become future building sites.

Policy 4.5.2c. Compact Neighborhoods Core Area Parking. In Core Areas of Compact Neighborhoods, offer parking near transit stations. Provide opportunities for long-term parking close to the transit stations to encourage park-and-ride commuting, and offer limited short-term parking opportunities near retail establishments.







